

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"BERMUDA GRASS"

Broadcast No. 38 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

January 14, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Thousands of Southern farmers who once gazed dejectedly over eroded acres, abandoned fields, are taking hope. They have found a new champion--a champion they once considered a mortal enemy--Bermuda grass. In California, where its aggressiveness is feared, it's called devil grass. Virginia recognizes its tenacity, for there it's called wire grass. Other areas know it as dogtooth grass, Bahama grass, Scotch grass. But down in Livingston County, Kentucky, it's plain old Bermuda grass--and Livingston County farmers learned about it from a pioneer and his son, David and Louis Adams. Near the turn of the century...

SOUND: Steamboat whistle in background, churning paddlewheels, growing nearer, as...

LOUIS

There comes the packet boat, father! Isn't she pretty! Just watch those wheels churn!

DAVID

Always a welcome sight, son. And it's always a big event when the boat brings the mail to Smithland.

LOUIS

I'd like to be a captain on one some day. (Laughing) Of course, perhaps I'd better learn to row a better oar than I do now, because I may be working on the ferry for Mr. Watts, like you used to.



DAVID

Not much danger of that, my boy. True, a husky lad like you can outpull a dozen of those darkies at that. But I want you to get that steamboat idea out of your head. Louis, you're the only boy out of six children. Maybe I'm wrong, but I want you to be a big cattleman some day.

LOUIS

Like you?

DAVID

No, not like me. Much bigger than me. Do you know how I started raising cattle?

LOUIS

Why, I s'pose you just started buying them with the money Mr. Watts paid you.

DAVID

Listen, son--let's sit down a minute. The packet boat won't dock for a spell...

LOUIS

But about you...

DAVID

...did you ever hear anyone say that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy?"

LOUIS

Why, sure...Benjamin Franklin.

DAVID

But in my case, I had to work. I got into the cattle business because I chopped wood in the moonlight.

LOUIS

Chopped wood in...(laughing)...gee, father, you're funny sometimes.

But...



DAVID

There aren't many funny things when you're just married and don't have any idea where you're going to get your next dollar. That's why I chopped wood in the moonlight.

LOUIS

One of the things mother told me about you before...she...went away...to Heaven was that you worked and slaved for all of us... and I guess even a boy of 17 can appreciate that.

DAVID

It's because you had a fine mother, Louis, and we had some fine children. But come, come, let's not get sentimental. What I started to tell you was, after I finished work for Mr. Watts, I used to go home, and after supper, I'd go out in the woods and cut timber, even in the dark sometimes.

LOUIS

That's what you meant. I understand, now. And you sold the wood?

DAVID

Yes, packet boats such as that one have to have wood to burn, and I sold it to them...still sell it, matter of fact. And since they ship cattle, lots of times I would take a calf or so in payment. And that's how I got into the cattle raisin' business. With my savings from what Mr. Watts paid me (nine dollars a month he paid me) and with my timber money, I bought that 200 acres. Son, it hasn't been very long since I started out, either, with 200 acres, a yoke of oxen and a cart, and 50 cents in money...pshaw, come on, let's go down to the post office and see what mail we got...

ORGAN: STEAMBOAT BILL.

CADE (fading in)

...and here's a package that came with that letter, David.



LOUIS

I'll take it, Mr. Cade.

CADE

All right, here you are, Louis.

LOUIS

Let's see what it is, father!

DAVID

Now, hold on, lad. Let's look at this letter first.

SOUND: Letter torn open.

DAVID

Oh, it's from your mother's sister, Aunt Jane Cromwell.

CADE

She's out in Texas, isn't she?

DAVID

Yes, she married and moved out there, you know.

CADE

That package is from Texas, too.

DAVID

Well, here's what she says:.....mmm...oh, she's sending us a sack of Bermuda grass settings.

CADE

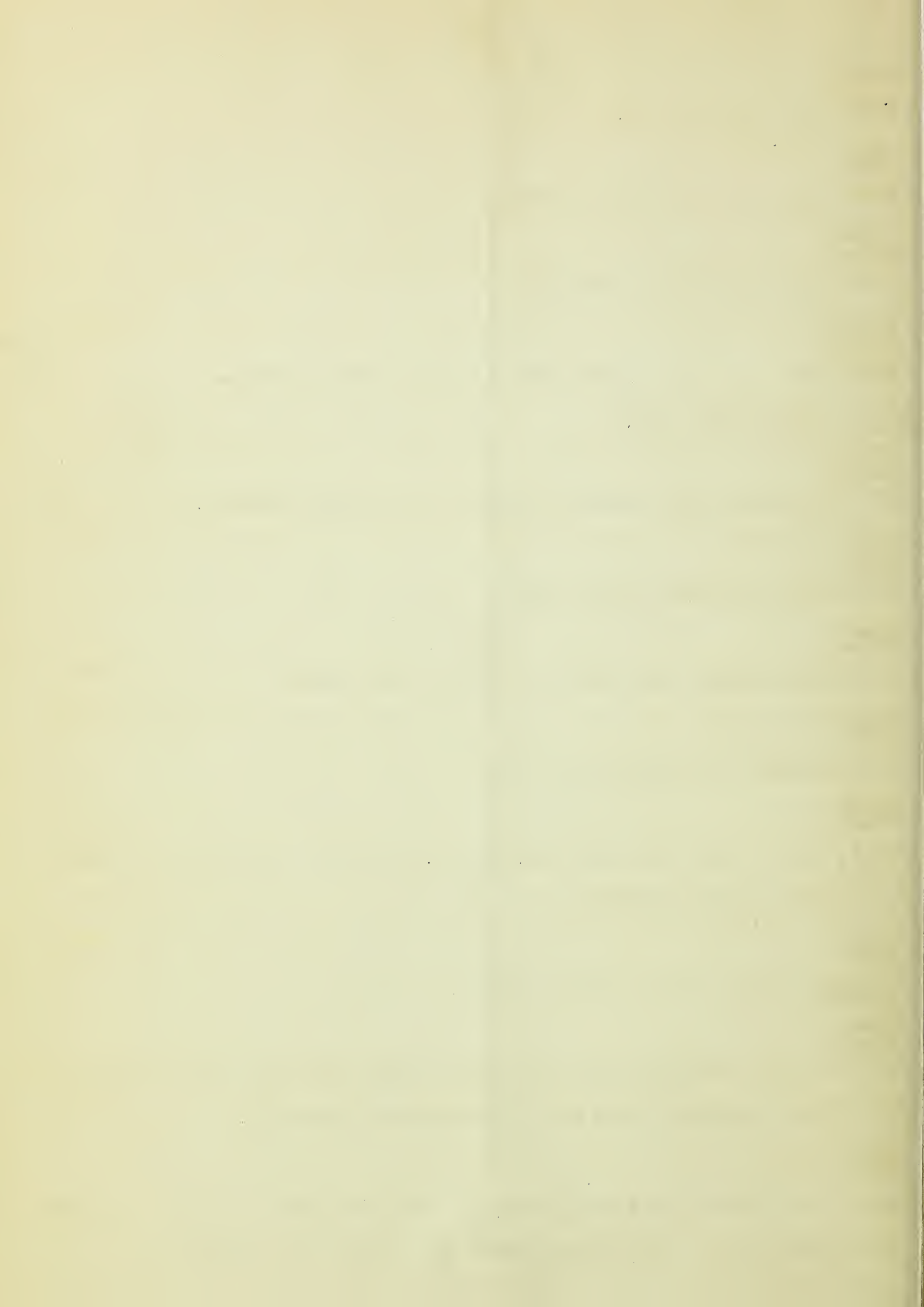
Bermuda grass? Whew! Now, why in...

DAVID

Yes, seems as though she's been impressed with the grass there, and she's wondering if it'll grow back in Kentucky.

CADE

Sure it'll grow, so I've heard at least, but don't you go starting it around here. Why, do you know what I've read about it?



DAVID

Can't imagine.

CADE

Well, I've heard plenty, and read plenty. And I know for a fact that there's plenty of people don't like Bermuda grass on account of it's near impossible to eradicate it from cultivated fields.

DAVID

I've heard about it, too. They tell me that it's being found remarkable for covering embankments. And I do know that a lot of agricultural writers have been saying that it makes a good pasture grass because it resists drought, and some of them even say it's a good fallow crop.

CADE

I know, I know. Livingston County is hilly and broken in places, and it's a right hard matter to keep these sand hills from washing if you don't keep them covered with grass, but...

DAVID

...I know that, Jim. If you even run a wagon over 'em, you start a trench. But some people say that Bermuda's the most valuable pasture plant in the Southern States. Of course, I've never seen any...

CADE

Neither have I, but I know for a fact that...well, I don't even see the sense in raising any kind of grass. Corn blades make a better and cheaper forage.



DAVID

Well, Jim, all I can say is, if some of these dwarf "skin and bones" cattle and horses had a vote on that question, they'd decide otherwise. Mind you, I'm not saying that Bermuda grass is any good for pasture...but...just the same, I'll try it out in the front yard...

ORGAN: STEAMBOAT BILL.

ANNOUNCER

That fall, David Adams set the Bermuda grass stems in a small plot in his front yard on "the point," near the junction of the Cumberland and the Ohio. Next year, he hoed around the grass and it spread. And as the years rolled by...

SOUND: Man grubbing Bermuda grass with hoe. Intersperse grubbing with first two or three remarks.

LOUIS (talking to himself)

This Bermuda...grass...sure has spread...and am I catching the devil because it got...into the garden...

MRS. OSGOOD (fading in)

...and is that a nice way to speak, Mr. Adams?

LOUIS (cheerily)

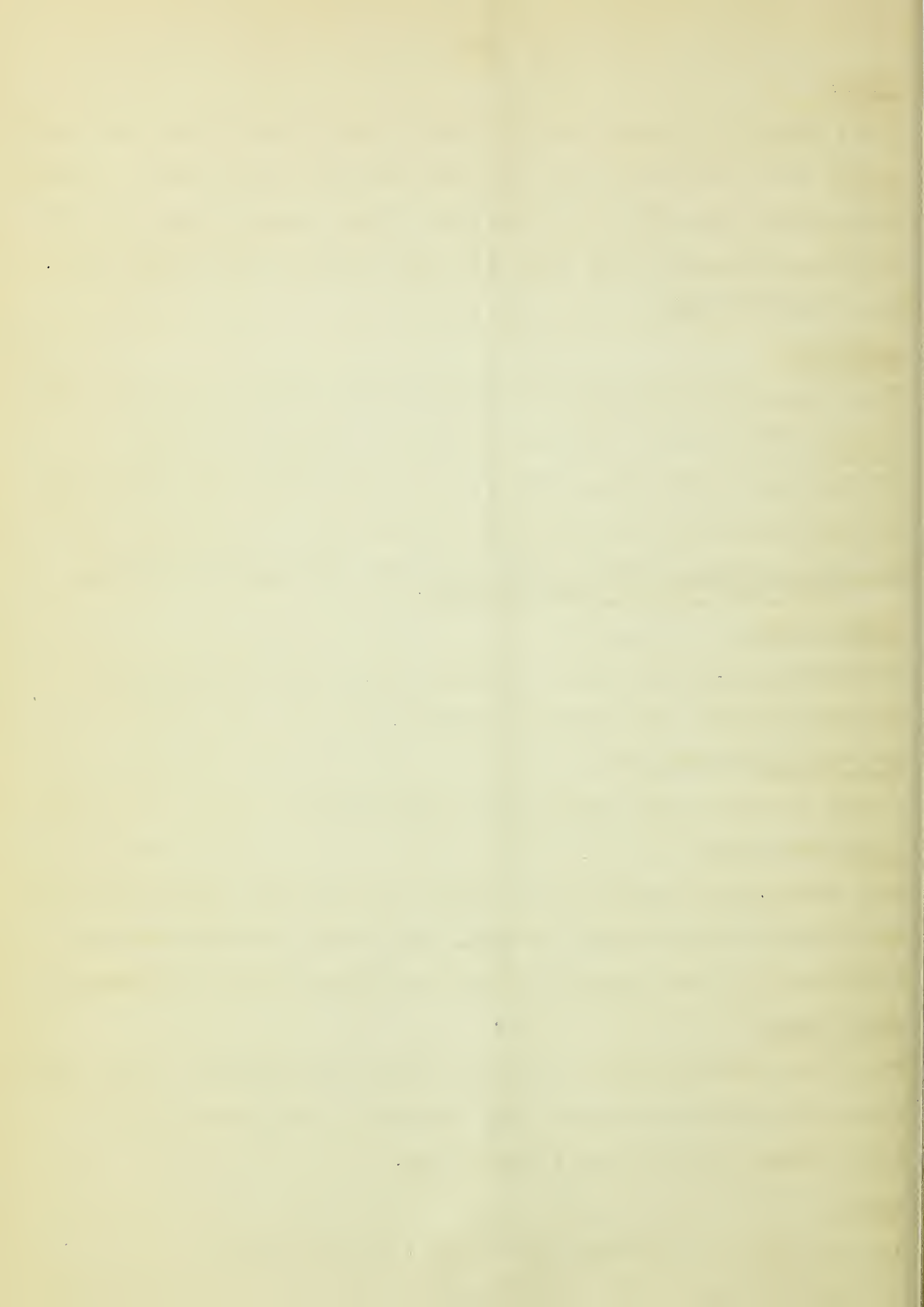
Oh! Hello, Mrs. Osgood! Didn't hear you walk up. I was so blamed mad at this Bermuda grass I could...but, well, you wouldn't be interested to know about that. Was you coming to see the missus?

MRS. OSGOOD

No, to be honest, I came to see you about that Bermuda. Seems like people from all around have been getting it from you to set in their lawns, so I thought I would, too.

LOUIS

I'll be glad to grub some sod for you, if you like.



MRS. OSGOOD

I sure wish you would.

LOUIS

But I'm going to warn you. It makes a swell lawn grass, but you want to watch it. It'll spread to your gardens. Seems like it wants to go wherever cultivated fields are.

MRS. OSGOOD

Then I better not hoe it.

LOUIS

No, the more it's hood the better it spreads. But I've noticed this--it won't grow much under trees, so shade is evidently the best way of destroying it.

MRS. OSGOOD

Well, for me, I don't want to destroy it. Maybe I'll try it out on the barnyard. You know, I hear more and more about Bermuda grass. People swear at it at first. I guess it's just like a little boy that gets a pony for Christmas. The pony's awful balky at first. The little boy wants to trade him for a billy-goat, or for a diamond ring made out of glass. But once the little boy gets used to the pony, he knows how to handle him. From then on they're pals, and they help each other. All right, Mr. Adams, I'll take your Bermuda grass...

ORGAN: MOON OVER KENTUCKY.



ANNOUNCER

And that's the first act in the story about a sack of Bermuda grass from Texas that led to widespread use of Bermuda in Western Kentucky. And farmers in Livingston County, and in McCracken, and in Graves, thank Louis Adams for his Bermuda grass--Bermuda which is spreading, Bermuda which is anchoring thousands of acres of eroded farmlands. And for the second act, here is Ewing Jones, of the Soil Conservation Service, at Dayton, Ohio.

JONES

Thank you, _____. We haven't said much about Bermuda grass for pastures, because I wanted to leave that to W. W. Carpenter, who is project technician of the Soil Conservation Service office at Paducah, Kentucky. He's just bubbling over with enthusiasm, and is waiting to tell us about how Louis Adams started using Bermuda in his pastures. So, for Act 2, Scene 1, Mr. W. W. Carpenter.

CARPENTER

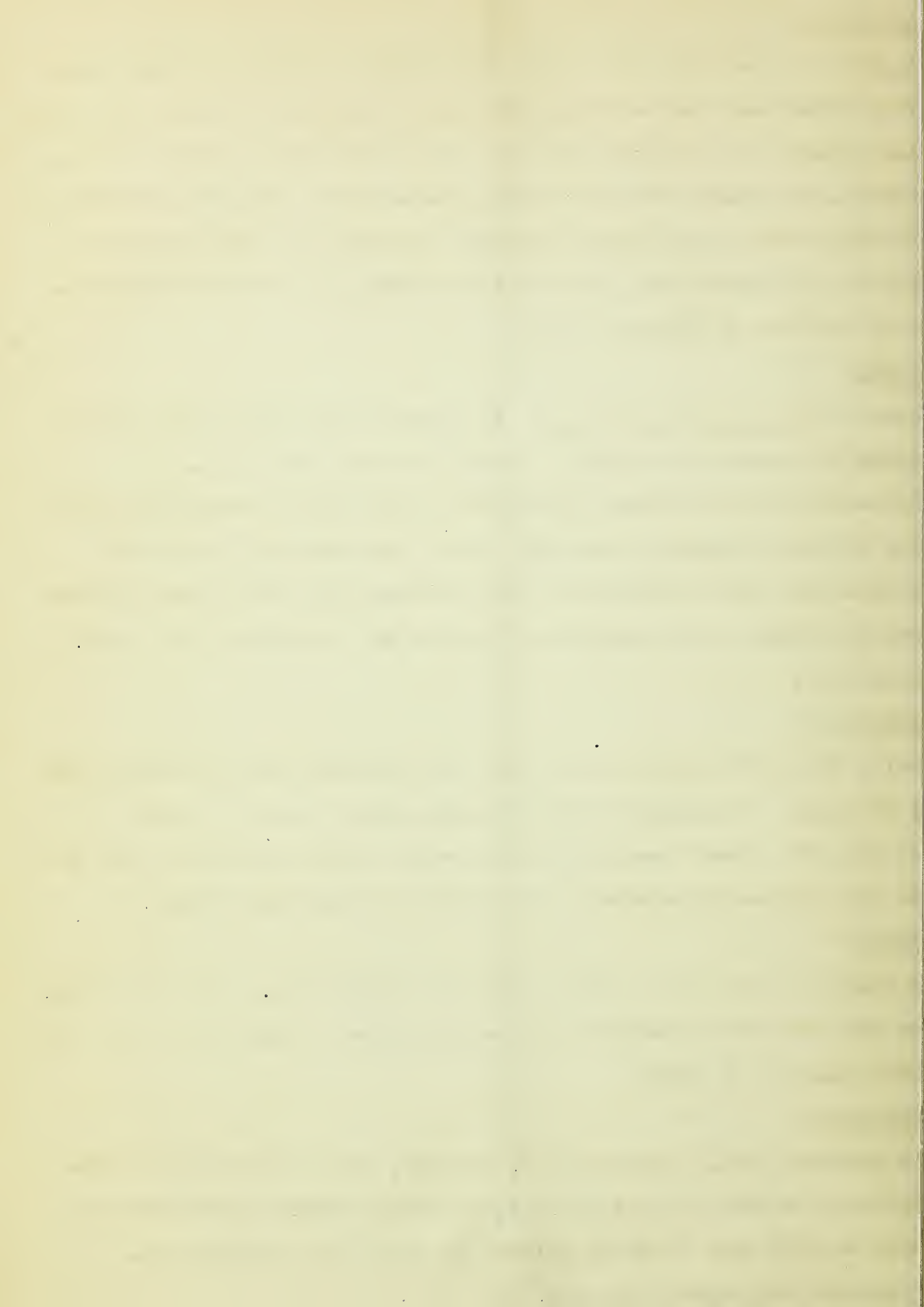
Well, Ewing, I'm not so sure about that bubbling over business, but I am mighty enthusiastic about Bermuda grass. More so, after mapping Mr. Adams' farm, and seeing what a swell pasture he has up on that knob--you remember, you can see it from the highway.

JONES

I remember quite well, and it certainly stands out. And that brings up the question of Bermuda as a pasture grass. Maybe we've laid too much emphasis on lawns.

CARPENTER

We probably have. Anyhow, A. H. Gilbert, one of our project technicians, is more or less of an authority on Bermuda grass down our way, and the last thing he told me before I left Paducah was, "remember Mr. Adams' pastures."



JONES

Anyone who has seen them can't forget.

CARPENTER

Anyhow, Mr. Adams was probably the first man in Western Kentucky to use Bermuda as a pasture grass. He planted 25 acres on a farm he had just purchased, using the grass that his father had planted on the old home place.

JONES

And how did he plant it?

CARPENTER

He plowed furrows about 4 feet apart, and 5 inches deep, dropped in the Bermuda grass stems, and plowed furrows back against the grass. The grass soon covered the area. Oh, I might mention that he planted it on top of hills where it was impossible to get other grasses or suitable vegetation started.

JONES

And so, by that time, he was fully sold on the use of Bermuda grass.

CARPENTER

No, on the contrary. Mr. Adams wasn't impressed with the true value of the grass until about six years ago, when he went down into Louisiana on one of his buying trips. On this trip he noticed...

JONES

...now just where was this?

CARPENTER

...somewhere between Vicksburg and Tallulah, I think...anyhow, he noticed that lespedeza was coming in the Bermuda along the levees and on some of the farms. Later he noticed that bluegrass was taking over areas of the Bermuda.



JONES

And now, suppose you summarize a few of Mr. Adams' experiences with Bermuda.

CARPENTER

Well, for one, in the 1936 drought, bluegrass and orchard grass were killed out. Bermuda came through in good shape. And then last October, pastures dried up, but the cattle ate the Bermuda.

JONES

And how about controlling erosion?

CARPENTER

Adams says, "That's the end of your erosion." And on land that would otherwise be worthless, he is now making a profit off from \$7 to \$8 to the acre. He plants it on land that is best suited for pasture land, and on eroded, worn-out hills, and in gullies.

JONES

Then from his experiences, and from your own, Bermuda grass seems to be one of the most satisfactory means of controlling erosion in the south.

CARPENTER

Yes, its use in terrace outlets, gullies, and pastures is being encouraged, and our cooperating farmers will agree that the results are satisfactory.

JONES

I know that some farmers object to this grass because it spreads so rapidly, but I think you'll agree that it can be controlled.



CARPENTER

Absolutely. Bermuda grass can't stand shade. And a lot of farmers are controlling it by using a strip of lespedeza sericea between the grass and the plowed field. If the stand is dense and is left uncut--except for seed--it will furnish sufficient shade to prevent spread of the grass.

JONES

You know, I was interested in the story of Mr. J. D. Short, who owns a dairy farm at Forest Hill, Tennessee. He says that Bermuda is one of the most dependable grasses he's ever used for grazing. And he says that it won't spread very rapidly on land that has not been cultivated or prepared for establishing a permanent pasture. One of the men from the Humboldt project, Ray Wedgworth, asked him what he thought about Bermuda and he replied, "It's not 'fittin' for but two things--that is, to graze, and to hold the soil together."

CARPENTER

And what more could you ask?

JONES

Certainly not very much.

CARPENTER

Well, I was interested in a report about a number of other Tennessee farmers...

JONES

You mean that one from Harry W. Pope, of the Collierville CCC camp?

CARPENTER

That's the one. Cooperating farmers down there report that Bermuda grass gives them the highest grazing capacity of any plant known to them.



JONES

And now, Willard, let's do a little summarizing. Point number one:

CARPENTER

Bermuda grass thrives in the South, where it grows on all types of soil, and finds extensive use for erosion control, for pastures, and for lawns.

JONES

And...

CARPENTER

I'd like to thank the University of Tennessee for this phrase, from one of its bulletins: for pasture purposes, during hot, dry weather, it is unexcelled among the permanent grasses..

JONES

And in mixtures...

CARPENTER

Bermuda and lespedeza make a fine combination. And if white clover or some other early legume, such as crimson clover, is added, an excellent pasture is possible from early spring to mid-fall.

JONES

And for erosion control...

CARPENTER

Because of its dense sod and creeping habit of growth, Bermuda is decidedly the best grass to prevent erosion and to stop gullies. And now, I'll go back to Paducah and the good old Bermuda grass country.



JONES

And take my thanks with you, W. W. Carpenter, of the Paducah office of the Soil Conservation Service. And spread those thanks around to Louis H. Adams, the "Bermuda grass king" of Western Kentucky, and to the memory of his father, David Adams, and to Aunt Jane Cromwell, who sent that sack of Bermuda grass from Texas to Kentucky away back in 1890.

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

If you would like a copy of the latest bulletin on erosion control, drop a postcard or a letter to Soil Conservation...that's Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, Strip Cropping in West Virginia.

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

#

